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The Arabian Mission

Quarterly Letters from the Field



Number Thirty-three, January to March, 1900

Muscat

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QUARTERLY LETTERS FROM THE ARABIAN MISSION

January-March, 1900.

MUSCAT.

*A Tour on
the Batana Coast.*

Although the boundaries of Oman are rather indefinite, yet it is safe to say that its extent is about that of the largest of the Eastern States, giving to your correspondent a wider field than falls to the lot of most missionaries. Fortunately Muscat is very central and to it all roads lead. It is probably our fault as well as misfortune, that in spite of this so much of it is still unknown country to us. The most accessible as well as populous part is the coast north of Muscat, which has been visited several times, last of all by our colporteur Elias, of whose interesting experiences I am going to tell you.

Our usual plan is to take a sailing boat to the furthest point we seek to reach, and from there return by land, stopping at all the towns on the road. For scores of miles it is a continuous date plantation, village succeeding village, and several large towns about a day's journey apart.

The coasting craft are small two-masted affairs, very clumsy and much shaken about if the sea is rough. There is a small cabin at the stern where passengers may get some protection from the sun and rain, and a chance to do a little cooking over a charcoal fire. Their trade is mostly in dates brought to Muscat, and rice and cotton goods taken back. Their time-tables are quite Oriental in their disregard not only of hours but of days. This time however Elias was quite fortunate as the distance to Lohar Nout, 150 miles, was covered in three days, including a few stops along the way. There were five other passengers including two Bedouins, who became much interested in Elias' books, insisting that he should give them a small one, and returning him a cordial invitation to visit them at their home among the valleys. But now I will give you his story as he tells it himself.

*An Argument
with a Jew.*

"I set out for Batana (the name for all this coast north of Muscat, on March 7th, and after remaining under the mercy of God three days, arrived at Lohar, Sunday evening, thanking God for his care of me, and afterwards finding a house. The next day I arose, and taking some books in my hand went into the market place. After I had remained there a little, a Jew came to the place where I was (there are a few families of Jews in Lohar, the only ones I believe in all Oman) and after saluting, opened speech with me saying, 'what have you of news from the Holy House?' (Jerusalem). I answered him, 'I have no news, and you, what do you know about the Holy House?' He said, 'I have heard from some Jews that very soon the Messiah will come.' I said, 'the Messiah has already come.' He answered me, 'when the Messiah comes he will walk according to the ordinances of Moses.' To which I said, 'yes, also Christ said, I am not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it.' To which he replied, 'then why don't you circumcise?' I said, 'Christ taught us that we should be circumcised in our hearts from the evil of this world; and what benefits circumcision if the heart is full of the uncleanness of the world?' And the Jew finally said, 'very well; when comes the Messiah not will arise a prophet after him. You believe this; then what do you say about Mohamed? Is not he a prophet?' And to this I replied, 'Oh my brother, search out your book whether it says or is mentioned that there will come a prophet Mohamed, and if the law says that he is a prophet why don't you believe in him? But we Christians, the the gospel teaches us, also the law, that everyone who comes after the Christ is false, and it is better, oh brother, that you examine this thing for yourself.'

*Trouble
with Moslems.*

"And after that I had established a few proofs from Isaiah and Daniel, he left me and went and said to the Mohamedans that this Christian who is selling books he reviles your prophet. And after half an hour while I was going about the market, and had sold about fifteen books, some people of Islam came and took a book from me giving me its price, and afterwards tore up the book before me. I said, 'why do you do this,' and they said 'this is but a little of what you deserve. Your desert is a knife in your body.' Then they proclaimed in the streets whoever takes a book from this Christian will be imprisoned. When I saw the tumult I returned with my books to the house and afterwards went to a coffee shop, and find-

ing many people there, I talked with them kindly, telling them that this was a lie from the Jew, and your Coran testifies to that when it says the Jews are deceitful and enemies of true believers, and while your Coran testifies this, will you doubt your Coran and believe this Jew? And they answered, verily we believe this talk is a stratagem of the Jew. Do not fear anything for your safety. But when I saw the tumult continued, I left the town the second day and journeyed to Saham; and after that I had found a house and placed my baggage in it, I took books in my hand and went about the market. Praise be to God, the sales were many, and afterwards they came to my house and also took books, and we talked together about spiritual things and about Christ and his excellence over the other prophets. In this town I sold about seventy scriptures. Then I went to Ghabura and praise God, I sold there more than

Good Sales.

a hundred. And there also I talked with them about spiritual things and especially about prayer, praying before them, and they said, 'this prayer is very good, but why don't you turn your face to the Holy Place. I answered them that God is in every place; wherever we turn our hearts to him, He is there. And they said, 'yes, that is true.'

"At this place I met a sheikh from an inland town who said he had been visited by Mr. Zwemer some years ago, and now seeing me he came for a bible, which I gladly sold to him."

This was the last place visited by Elias. He had sold 208 scriptures and his stock was so nearly exhausted that it did not seem worth while to visit the other towns between Ghabura and Muscat, and so he returned by boat, having been gone only two weeks. After replenishing his stock he intended returning and completing the tour, but suddenly was taken down with fever, which did not leave him until it was too late to start on a long

Bahrein.

journey, his return having already been decided upon. Instead he visited a few small villages inland, where although his sales were smaller, he yet had a cordial welcome from the people. As I write he is on his way back to Bahrein, where he expects to go on an extended tour with Mr. Zwemer. Elias is a fine man and enjoys touring very much; his having had so much fever in Muscat though, may make it difficult for me to get him back.

An Open Field.

The field here seems so open for colporteurage, that it will be a great loss if we cannot take advantage of it. Already our Bible sales, over

five hundred, have nearly reached the entire total for last year, and if it were not for the unhealthfulness of Muscat itself, and also the restrictions which the advent of the plague is beginning to impose, we could expect a wide and promising seed-sowing of God's word. May the prayers of our friends in America unite with ours for a reaping to speedily follow this scattering of the Word.

JAMES CANTINE.

FIRST EXPERIENCES IN ARABIC.

January 17, 1900, marks the beginning of my career as a student of Arabic, for this was the day on which, together with Jusuf, my teacher, I sat at the desk in Mr. Zwemer's study and tried to make the strange Arabic hieroglyphics, which are twenty-eight in number. I learned them as do the Arab boys, winding up with the phrase: *Ma salaam*—"with peace." Strange are some of these letters at first sight, and without practice some can scarcely be distinguished from others, much less so pronounced as to make the proper distinction.

The verb and the noun require the most attention. A mere glance at the verb makes one stagger. We are told that some verbs have regular forms, while others—and they, alas! are the verbs in common use—depart from the ordinary, each forming a category by itself. The conjugations are most prolific, being no less than seventeen in number. This, though at first sight it appears gigantic, yields very nicely to the rules, so that it is a most interesting process to see how the same root yields so many different shades of meaning. As a matter of interest and curiosity I have made the following attempt:

1. *Katala*—he killed.
2. *Kattala*—he slaughtered.
3. *Kaatala*—he fought.
4. *Aktala*—he feigned death.
5. *Takattala*—he was slaughtered.
6. *Takaatala*—he fought a duel.
7. *Inkatala*—he was killed.
8. *Iktatala*—he lay killed.
9. *Iktalla*—he was mangled.
10. *Istakatala*—he sought death.

These will suffice to give an idea of the formation of the words. It is a matter of comparative ease calmly to sit in your study and dig out the various shades of meaning which the peculiar form of the word suggests, but it is quite a different matter when you sit among a group of men rapidly chatting in a noisy bazaar ; while, if you would make your first attempt at joining in the conversation, it would take you all day to get started ! Hence the question naturally arises : Will I ever be able to speak Arabic fluently ?

But the verb is not the only difficulty. A fair rival is the noun with its multiplex formations, its dual number, its regular and its irregular plurals ; together with the various forms of the masculine and feminine genders and their declensions. While speaking with Mr. Zwemer about this matter, I told him that I thought each noun formed its plural in a way peculiar to itself. Greatly to my surprise he informed me that there even were *regular* plurals ! De Sacy enumerates no less than thirty-one different forms of the plural. The plurals are a strange thing. There is first the ordinary plural ; then there is the plural of paucity expressing any number between three and ten ; then there is the plural of multitude denoting any number between ten and infinity ; finally, there is the plural of a plural which cannot express a number less than nine. There are no less than four ways to make the plural of paucity, while the other plurals are for the most part content with three forms.

The nouns are as a rule derived directly from the verbs. I found by actual count that there are considerably more than 100 different possible combinations. For example, a simple word composed of three letters can be pronounced in no less than twelve ways, most of which are in common use. While this appears to be discouraging at first, one soon learns to appreciate it, for, once having mastered a few roots, a considerable vocabulary is very soon acquired.

There is one more difficulty worth mentioning, namely, the difference between the spoken language and the book language. Indeed, so great is this difference that no less a scholar than Ion Keith Falconer, Lecturer at Cambridge, who knew the book language perfectly, found it necessary to acquire the spoken language before he could converse with the Arabs at Aden. This difference occurs also in the manner of writing the characters.

This is the language I must master before I can begin the

work I have come to do. The difficulties may be great, but it is marvellous what a person may accomplish by hard work and earnest prayer. It is not a hopeless undertaking. It is in the air, and a person by being ever on the alert breathes it in as he does the air. In the wee small hours of the still unborn day fall on my ears the echoes of the Mohammedan call to prayers. All day long I live in an atmosphere of Arabic, ever listening to others or studying with Jusef at my side, while the last thing at night I hear Arabic as it falls from the lips of the late passers by. In this way I hope faithfully to toil on day by day till the day dawn when I may deliver in this tongue the message I have come to bring—the message of Christ crucified. In the meantime I bid you “Ma salaam.”

HENRY J. WIERSUM.

THE ANNUAL MEETING—BUSRAH.

Our Annual Meeting.

The Annual Meeting of the Mission was held this year in Busrah from the 7th to the 13th of January. It was the largest of these gatherings held thus far, the whole force, which now numbers nine, having come together. To us and to all lovers of Arabia the increase in our numbers is a source of hopefulness, as our force is now assuming some proportion, we cannot say to our field, but to the stations that we hold. However, if we analyze this number with reference to the possibilities of service, the result is not so encouraging for the current year. For one has just joined us and is assigned to language work exclusively, another has returned home on furlough. Of the other four missionaries, two have still language work to do, while of the three assistant missionaries one only has a working knowledge of the language. The outlook is brighter for next year, when the majority of us will be ready for active service.

The sessions were begun on Sunday morning with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, when also several of the English community were present. At the afternoon service in Arabic, Mr. Zwemer preached a sermon and Mr. Cantine baptized two children of the native assistants and also three of the boys from the Muscat Freed Slave School, viz. : Solomon, Philip and Isaac, who are now in the charge of Mr. Zwemer, Dr. Thoms and Mr. Barny respectively. These are first-fruits of the school, for though their guardians stood up as their sponsors, they received this sacrament at their requests. In the evening there was a devotional service

led by Dr. Thoms. We held three sessions in each of the following five days. In the morning there was a devotional service in Arabic in which we used the topics of the Evangelical Alliance for the Week of Prayer as our meetings very fortunately came in that week. We felt ourselves much strengthened in our appeals at the Throne of Heavenly Grace by the thought that though few, we were in fellowship in our asking

DR. WORRAL REV. S. M. ZWEMER REV J. CANTINE MRS. BARNY REV H. J. WIERSUM



DR. AND MRS. THOMS KATHRINA MRS ZWEMER REV F J. BARNY

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ARABIAN MISSIONARIES.

TAKEN BY MUHSIN PASHA, JAN. 1900.

with the many members of the body of Christ. These morning services were followed by accounts of the work by those in charge of stations or medical work, ending with discussions. In the afternoons there were business sessions, and in the evenings again devotional meetings, with such topics as "How to Increase our Capacity for Usefulness," by Mr. Cantine; "Private Prayer and Bible Study," by Mr. Wiersum; "The Secret of Missionary Con-

tentment," by Mr. Zwemer, and "Devotion to Christ," by Mr. Barny. The week was a profitable one spiritually, as may be judged from the above topics. It was also a busy one, and all agreed that it was an enjoyable one. The spacious mission house at Busrah proved most convenient, as all found accommodation in it.

Of business, there was a great deal to be attended to. There were numerous financial accounts to be audited and reported upon, yearly reports to be heard and candidates to be examined in the language, besides many discussions of plans and policies, some of which resulted in definite resolutions. A committee was appointed to report on the possibility and desirability of a school in Busrah. The Board was requested to allow the ladies of the mission, if they take an active part in the regular work, the privilege of voting on all matters connected with the mission. The assignment of missionaries for the year was made as follows: Mr. Cantine is to remain in charge of Muscat Station, Mr. Zwemer of Bahrein, and Mr. Barny of Busrah Station. Dr. Worrall to remain in charge of the Busrah Dispensary until his furlough, when Dr. Thoms on completing his first language examinations shall take charge until such time as he can go to Bahrein to take charge of the medical work there. Mr. Wiersum is to spend his first year at Bahrein and Muscat in language study. Mrs. Zwemer was assigned special work for women at Bahrein, and Mrs. Dr. Thoms to medical work with her husband.

A few of the resolutions given verbatim may interest our friends.

Some Resolutions. *Resolved,* That in view of his early and continued interest in the Arabian Mission and his position and influence among our English contributors, we recommend that W. A. Buchanan, Esq., of London, be elected an Honorary Trustee of the Arabian Mission.

Resolved, That the employment of Bible women be made a feature of our work.

Resolved, That part of the Press Fund at Muscat (Rs. 37-6-8) be used for the purchase of controversial literature.

Resolved, That we record with deep sorrow the death of our brother and comrade in the work, George Edwin Stone, at Bisket, near Muscat, on June 26, 1899. His short time of service in Arabia was full of spiritual blessing to all those with whom he

came in contact. He endeared himself to us all by his humility, faithfulness, tact, unselfishness, contentment and sterling character. We mourn our loss, but pray that a portion of his spirit may rest on each one of us.

The two following resolutions we hope may deeply interest all of our friends :

Resolved, That in view of the present needs and promise of the work we unanimously appeal to the Board for the following reinforcements to be sent out immediately : Two single ladies for evangelistic work ; a medical missionary for touring in Oman and a *specially* qualified worker (lay, medical or clerical) for evangelistic work among the Bedouin tribes.

Resolved, That we agree to make the actions
Pray With Us. of our Annual Meeting the subject of our prayers at the Morning Watch, especially the matter of our appeal for new missionaries, and that we ask our native brethren on the field and our friends at home to unite with us therein.

F. J. BARNY.

BAHREIN.

This quarter has been one in which we have, at Bahrein, strengthened the stakes rather than lengthened the cords of our mission-tent. No tours were made outside of the islands, but our work has been focussed to one point. Intensive rather than extensive for more than one reason.

New Mission Headquarters.

In answer to much prayer, and in spite of many obstacles that seemed to men insurmountable, God has solved the vexed problem of securing a suitable dwelling for us. The owner of the house we occupied for the past four years gave us notice of eviction some months ago ; the house was narrow and inconvenient ; no other offered, and every door seemed closed. But just in the nick of time a friendly Persian offered to build a house according to our plans, on eight year's lease, at a reasonable figure. Some of our time, therefore, was taken up, the past two months, in watching the builders, offering an occasional suggestion here or putting a veto there to secure what was in the contract. The new house is now nearing completion. We expect to move into it in a month at the latest if nothing unforeseen happens. Eight year's lease of more commodious quarters means eight years more of (we hope

wider and deeper) mission effort. The Arabs no longer doubt that we have come to stay. Christ's bugle never sounds a retreat, and none of us should disappoint our Captain by turning back or by delay in bringing up the reserves. The battle is still on.

*New Stock of
Ammunition.*

Our Bible-shop has not only seen the face of a new man from Mosul whom we are trying to train for service as a colporteur, but its shelves are filled with a better and larger stock of Scriptures and books than ever before. We owe a large debt of gratitude to the two Bible Societies and our sister missions in Beyrout and Cairo for these weapons of war. The Arabic Press Catalogue of the Syrian Mission has 661 titles of good literature, much of it suitable for our field at the present stage of work. While from Cairo we receive controversial literature of tried character; books in reply to the infamous Moslem attacks on the Christian religion and little leaflets that speak the truth in love without beating about the bush. There is no use running the plow against stumps; but where the soil is rocky and has lain fallow for centuries you've got to use a plow of some sort before you scatter seed to any purpose. One of the chief *mullahs* here confessed that the "Beacon of Truth" was unanswerable; another is reading Eddy's "Commentary on the New Testament" to see whether Christ really died on the Cross for sinners; a young lad came for a second copy of the "Proof of the Integrity of the New Testament," because he said he liked the argument.

An Afghan dervish came to the shop in February. He brought a Bible; said he had long been convinced of the fact that Islam offered no hope for a sinner; came to learn Christian prayers. At my very first interview with him I was surprised how he had grasped the very marrow of the Gospel. He came to our Bible Class on a Sunday, spent Monday morning in reading with me, and went away promising to come back soon. He never came, and we utterly lost trace of him. He may have feared public confession or have been driven away by persecution; we know not. He did *not* seek loaves and fishes and he was not far from the kingdom. How did the truth first reach his heart in far-off Cabul?

In the room near the door of our courtyard, and which measures eleven by twenty feet, some four hundred and fifty patients received treatment during the quarter. Persians, Arabs, Jews,

*Multum in
Parvo.*

Beloochis, Afghans and Hindoos, men, women and children. Once we had two merchants from Mecca with sore thumbs, and again a wanderer from the interior of Yemen with fever. The most common complaints were ulcers or decayed teeth; a yard of clean bandage with iodoform or a twist of the forceps makes friends in such cases. Hare-lip, tuberculosis of the knee-joint, cataracts, gunshot wounds and large tumors—such cases only appeal for help to be disappointed by our oft-repeated promises that a qualified physician will come to Bahrein. Beside those who received help at our house, we must count the women and children treated by Mrs. Zwemer in their huts or by the wayside. Sometimes this treatment takes the form of a flannel garment or baby-wrap against the bleak north wind that pierces the mat-shelter of the poor. While the dispensary is adjourning down-stairs, the kindergarten begins in a sheltered corner of the verandah up-stairs. Dictation and reading for the two Muscat lads; multiplication and Mark's Gospel and catechism for Nejma; songs, exercises and Arabic "a-b-c" for the wee ones. While in the midst of it all, early callers and the water-carrier interrupt the mistress of the school, who is also the lady of the house.

On Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons we have our Bible study for the colporteurs. The Book of Acts is our subject for the whole year at all our stations, and there is to be a competitive examination of all our helpers. Our Sunday services in English and Arabic are very simple, but to us very precious, though our numbers are few.

*The Exile
Soldier of the
Cross.*

From time to time we continue to hear by letter from the exiled convert of whom Mr. Cantine wrote and whose family are under our roof. He has more liberty and seems to grow in grace. But when he last wrote, had been severely ill from cold and exposure. He asked earnestly that one of our missionaries would come over and baptize him, and if this, as he feared, were impossible, that we would ask the American missionaries in Asia Minor, near the place of his exile, to do it. He most pathetically asked his absent wife and children to read I Peter v: 10-12. God make your prayers to abound for him and his; as well as for others in like condition.

S. M. ZWEMER,

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